



Personal Ethics

based on the book
"How Good People Make Tough Choices"
Copyright 1995 by Rushworth M. Kidder

Introduction

This module is designed to help all Coast Guard men and women understand the importance of ethical fitness and to provide a framework for analyzing ethical dilemmas. The "right versus wrong" issues we face have obvious "right" answers. True ethical dilemmas involve "right versus right" situations in which both choices are right, but one must be chosen. This module will help you prepare yourself to resolve ethical dilemmas.

How This is Different Than What You Have Seen Before: This entire module is based on *How Good People Make Tough Choices*, by Rushworth Kidder, president of the Institute for Global Ethics. The book may be purchased prior to the training for each student. The module follows the book's flow and uses examples provided in the book as well as examples from the students.

Road Map

Topics covered in this Module:

- ☐ Why Ethics Matters
- ☐ Ethical Fitness
- ☐ Core Values
- ☐ Right vs. Right
- ☐ Resolution Principles

WHY ETHICS MATTERS

Ask/Discuss: Why are we talking about ethics today? Where do we get ethics from? Should ethics be taught in school? Why/why not? If we found that there were values shared by all of us, would you say those values should be taught in school? Look at honesty. How many of you want your children to be honest? Is honesty a trait people value in each other? Should children be taught honesty in school?

State: Does anyone remember the Chernobyl nuclear explosion in the Ukraine in 1986? (Brief summary: The core of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded after inappropriate conduct by two engineers, sending a radioactive plume three miles into the air. 31 workers died, and thousands of civilians later died from radiation poisoning.) What were the events that led up to the single greatest nuclear disaster in the industrial age?

- Two electrical engineers were working in the control room
- They conducted an unauthorized experiment to see how long the turbine would freewheel after the power was removed
- They overrode six separate alarms that said “STOP!”
- They padlocked the valves in the open position to keep emergency over-rides from closing
- Core overheated and exploded

State: So why does ethics matter? One hundred years ago, if you took the largest ship in the world, filled it with the most hazardous cargo known at the time, got the skipper drunk and ran the ship aground in the most sensitive of natural habitats, how much damage would be done? Discuss the Exxon Valdez spill. What were the damages?

State: At what other times in history could a regular person off the street have caused so much damage with so little effort? Some examples include:

- Littleton, Colorado shootings
- Oklahoma City bombing
- Unabomber
- World Trade Center bombing
- The Exxon Valdez

State: These are examples of people who wanted to do damage. How about a truck driver carrying toxic chemicals driving for 24 hours straight at 20 miles above the speed limit so he can make his delivery on time to put

food on the table for his family? Or the person who is late for work so they speed through a neighborhood school zone? Or any of the hundreds of reasons we do things we know is wrong for some “justifiable” reason.

State: Ethics matters because one person (you) can make one bad decision that could adversely alter the lives of many people.

Moral Barometer

State: Let’s talk about something called the “Moral Barometer.” The Moral Barometer is a metaphorical scale to think about how our society measures up from a moral perspective.

Do: Split the group into equal sized teams of 3-5 people each. Have each team:

- Decide the direction of our current Moral Barometer (up or down)
- Provide specific examples

Discuss: Have the teams brief the results and supporting data. Facilitate a short discussion on the results. (There are no right or wrong answers).

Read: Read what William Wordsworth wrote to John Milton in response to his poem *Paradise Lost* from 135 years earlier:

“Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters; altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men.”
Note: A “fen” is a low, flat, marshy bog
(Sonnet VIII, “London, 1802”)

State: The important point of the Moral Barometer is to give us a common framework for looking at issues and the world around us.

ETHICAL FITNESS

What is “Ethical Fitness”?

State: Ethical Fitness is a person’s state of readiness to make a “big” ethical decision.

Relating ethical fitness to physical fitness, most people are not asked to run a marathon every day. However, if you knew you would be asked to run a

marathon, you would begin training months in advance. You might run a few miles every other day and work your way up to 100 miles/week before the race. When asked to run the marathon, you would be ready.

Ethical fitness works the same way. We may not be required to make ethical decisions that impact many people every day; however, we need to be able to make small decisions that will help us become ready for an unexpected “ethical marathon.”

Do: Have a student read the “Trooper’s dilemma.”

Trooper’s Dilemma: “A large flatbed truck had gone off the highway and hit a tree head-on. On impact, its load of steel had torn loose and slid forward through the back of the cab, pinning the driver helplessly inside. The cab was on fire, in danger of exploding any minute. A state police trooper arrived on scene. As the trooper ran to the open cab window, he heard the truck driver inside screaming, ‘Shoot me! Shoot me!’ It was obvious that the trooper could not lift off that load of steel and free the driver. So, with the flames growing in intensity, the trooper slowly removed his service pistol from his holster. Then he paused, reconsidered, and slid the revolver back into his holster. And then amid the driver’s screams, he removed it a second time, paused, and put it back once again. It was at that point in this agonized struggle that the trooper did a remarkable thing. Running back to his cruiser, he grabbed a small carbon tetrachloride fire extinguisher. It was hardly enough to quell the fire. But it was large enough to spray in the driver’s face and put him to sleep, which is what he did. Shortly thereafter, the truck exploded.”

State: That Trooper was just handed a pair of running shoes and told to run a marathon. If he hadn’t been working out, it would have been a very painful and exhausting run. But the Trooper was ethically fit and able to choose a path many of us would never have considered. Would you be ready to make that kind of decision?

Morals and
Ethics

Ask: How do you define morals? How do you define ethics?

Do: Gather the responses of 3-4 people.

State: The word “moral” is derived from the Latin word *moris* meaning “manner, custom, habit, or conduct.” Typically, moral is used to mean that

which is good or proper. The word ethics is derived from the Greek word *ethos* meaning “custom, usage or character.”

State: A working definition of ethics is: “Obedience to the unenforceable.” At one end we have laws (or the enforceable) and at the other end we have free choice (or the unenforceable). In the middle is ethics. This is the middle ground where we technically can make any decision we want but we feel compelled to make a certain decision based on societal norms, morals, customs, etc.

CORE VALUES

Different Values Systems

Read: Have a student read the William Stafford poem “Traveling Through the Dark.”

“Traveling through the dark I found a deer
dead on the edge of the Wilson River road.
It is usually best to roll them into the canyon:
that road is narrow; to swerve might make more dead.
By glow of the tail-light I stumbled back of the car
and stood by the heap, a doe, a recent killing;
she had stiffened already, almost cold.
I dragged her off; she was large in the belly.
My fingers touching her side brought me the reason-
her side was warm; her fawn lay there waiting,
alive, still, never to be born.
Beside that mountain road I hesitated.
The car aimed ahead its lowered parking lights;
under the hood purred the steady engine.
I stood in the glare of the warm exhaust turning red;
around our group I could hear the wilderness listen.
I thought hard for us all—my only swerving—
then I pushed her over the edge into the river.”

Do: Questions to ask:

- What was this person thinking about?
 - What factors go into making a decision like this?
 - Was the person’s decision “right”? Why or why not?
- (Allow 10 minutes for discussion.)

Ask: What other types of value systems exist (other than moral values)?

- **Political values:** Many political values (certainly not all!) are not moral issues. One nation's foreign policy values may be grounds for intense discussion and may serve to separate people into liberal or conservative parties. However, your individual stand on most political issues probably will not get you labeled moral or immoral.
- **Economic values:** The types of clothes you wear, the amount of money you earn, and the stores where you shop do not classify you as moral or immoral.
- **Culinary values:** The types of food you eat—only vegetables or only meat—will not define you as moral or immoral.

Codes of Ethics

Ask: What is a code of ethics?
What does one look like?
Why do we have them?
What are some examples?

Discuss: Codes of ethics are becoming more popular in today's business world. Codes of ethics are designed to serve as simple moral rules by which a company lives. Many of you may think they are useless, but they can be very powerful! It is important to note that these codes are brief. The longest of the examples, the Boy Scout Law is only 12 items long. It is also the most widely memorized code of ethics. Codes of ethics are also not usually overly defined. They are simple enough that they can be interpreted and understood by everyone in the company.

Example: In 1982, Johnson and Johnson received a report that there had been some deaths from cyanide linked to Tylenol capsules. It was not clear whether the capsules were tampered with or manufactured improperly. Tylenol was generating \$100 million annually at the time. Using the code of ethics developed under Chairman James Burke, Johnson & Johnson removed every form of Tylenol from every shelf of every store. They recalled all of the products from their customers as well. The poisoning turned out to be caused by aberrant behavior and was not the company's fault. Eighteen months later, Johnson and Johnson had regained their market share and introduced their new tamper proof bottles and earned the respect of their customers for life.

Universal
Values

Do: Tell the group you would like to generate a large list of values. Make sure they understand that if a person does not have the trait, they will be considered immoral. Conduct an unstructured brainstorming session and write the items on a dry-erase board or flipchart. Once the list has been generated, eliminate repeats and combine similar items.

Do: Split the group into two. Give them the following directions:

- You now sit on a college's Board of Trustees.
- The new state of the art academic building has finally been completed.
- There is a large stone plaque above the entrance and you want to inscribe on it the three moral values that your students must have when they graduate.
- Using the large list that you just generated and as a group, choose the three most important moral values.
- Keep in mind—your future students will be considered immoral if they graduate without these traits.
- Each group will have 15 minutes to reach consensus.

Do: Have each group brief their list and explain why.

STATE: In doing these types of exercises, the Institute for Global Ethics found that there are eight core values that transcend culture, religion, race, and nationality. They are:

- **Love**
- **Truth**
- **Fairness**
- **Freedom**
- **Unity**
- **Tolerance**
- **Responsibility**
- **Respect for life**

Discuss: It is important that the students understand that these values come up the same, no matter the culture or time period. For example, It would be considered morally wrong to fly into any country and walk up to the first person you saw and steal their things or kill them or lie to them, or detain them, etc.

Values-Tactics
Ladder

Ask: Why do we care that there is a set of values shared by everyone?
What good could come from this knowledge?

State: There is a reason why we must care about having a set of values that transcend all cultures. By looking at common values, we can often redirect energy from arguments to conflict resolution. Let's look at the Values-Tactics ladder.



State: The Values-Tactics ladder shows that, generally, different people find common areas of agreement on Values. As they move down the ladder to the Goals, Plans, and Tactics for supporting those values, they are less likely to find common ground and often disagree. So in most cases, people don't become violently opposed to each other's Values—they argue over the Goals, Plans, and Tactics that support those Values.

Example: Let's take a look at the **value** of truth. We all likely agree that promoting honesty in our schools is a good idea. Usually we get 100% agreement on this value. So if we set a **goal** that no children will be caught cheating on their tests, most people will support this goal but some would be opposed because they feel that catching children cheating is not enough. Now let's say our **plan** is to set up video cameras in the classroom to catch potential cheaters. Less than 50% of the population would likely agree at this point. And finally our **tactic** might be to paddle all cheaters in the school gym in front of the student body. Probably close to 100% of the population would aggressively oppose this tactic. But remember we all agreed on the **value**—that honesty and truth are important!

State: The disagreement and conflicts over issues frequently stem from disagreements on the plans or tactics—not the values themselves. Looking at issues from this perspective helps us to see that there are always two or more sides to every issue.

Right vs. Right

State: Throughout our careers we sit through ethics courses that have told us simply to do the right thing. We were told, "Do not accept gifts of more

than five dollars in value from anyone. Do not cheat on your travel claim. Do not steal pens from work.” That is not what we are going to talk about here. Most of the time we all know when we are doing the “wrong” thing. When you are faced with a right vs. wrong decision, that is called a moral temptation. We are quite aware of the right thing to do, but we are tempted to do the wrong thing. There is usually an obvious “right” path to take in right vs. wrong decisions. We are now going to talk about true dilemmas—“right vs. right” situations. Let’s look at an example modified for the Coast Guard.

Example: Petty Officer Jones works for you. She has been an outstanding worker and you have written her several positive page 7s and nominated her for Sailor of the Quarter. Recently, she was diagnosed with a medical condition that is almost always disqualifying for continued service in the CG. Her medical review board findings are due any day now and she is understandably edgy. The CO calls you into his office and says, “PO Jones is not going to be staying in the Coast Guard. I know how sensitive these situations can be so I don’t want you to say a word about it to her.” As you get back to the office, PO Jones stops you and asks if you have heard anything. You see the stress in her face and realize that she is not handling the pressure well. What do you say?

State: This situation is a right vs. right dilemma. On one hand, it is right to maintain the confidence of your CO and follow a direct order. On the other hand, PO Jones is under a lot of strain and it is right to try to tell her the truth and help her. The first step in trying to find the best answer in a right vs. right situation is to figure out what type of situation it is.

State: There are four paradigms for right vs. right situations.

- ❑ **Truth vs. Loyalty**
- ❑ **Individual vs. Community**
- ❑ **Short-term vs. Long-term**
- ❑ **Justice vs. Mercy**

Truth vs. Loyalty

State: The example with PO Jones is a clear truth vs. loyalty situation. On the one hand we are told always to tell the truth and it is wrong to do otherwise. On the other hand, it is right to maintain our loyalty to friends and co-workers by keeping confidences.

Example: When might lying be the right thing to do? Imagine that you are a fighter pilot in an F-14. You are shot down over enemy territory. Your

navigator is injured but will survive. You bandage your buddy's wounds and hide him under bushes just as the enemy finds you. They ask you where your friend is. Do you tell the truth? Would you tell them, "He's over there under those bushes." Of course not!

Individual vs.
Community

State: Individual vs. community is similar to the Mr. Spock vs. Captain Kirk mentality as seen on the TV show *Star Trek*. On one hand you have Spock who says the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few. But Kirk would say that the individual is more important than the many. Which is right? The answer, of course, is they both are. It is right to do what is best for the community. It is also right to protect the individual.

Example: During World War II, an American fighter pilot was captured by the Nazis, was tortured and forced to reveal all that he knew about future operations. Because he was not involved in planning operations, his information was not much use to the enemy. He was placed in a cell. Later, another pilot was placed in the same cell. This pilot was a friend and had yet to be interrogated. The second pilot asked his friend what kind of things the Nazis would do to him in the interrogation. As his friend spoke, he became more concerned. As it turned out, the second pilot was in operations planning and knew several key pieces of classified information. He knew that his threshold for pain was low and felt that the Nazis would easily get the information from him in the morning. He did not feel like he could kill himself so he asked his friend to do it before they took him away. What would you have done? It is right not to kill a person without just cause. On the other hand, many Americans would be killed if that information got out. Both are right but you cannot do both.

Short-term vs.
Long-term

State: We face long-term vs. short-term decisions daily. On the one hand, it is important to take care of the current needs. Conversely, it is right to prepare and plan for the future. The problem is, sometimes you cannot do both.

Example: You have just received a large check from an unexpected source. You and your family have been living lean and could use some extra money. Do you save the money for the future (college, car loans, etc.) or do you take your family on a much-needed vacation? Both are right, which do you choose?

Justice vs.
Mercy

State: Justice vs. mercy is one of the oldest dilemmas known. It is a choice between punishing by the letter of the law and granting leniency when there is wrong doing.

Example: You are the head coach of a high school basketball team. Your team had a fantastic season. You have three players who hold the majority of the talent on the team and you feel certain that college scouts will be looking their way soon. You have some simple rules that your players must follow. One of the rules relates to how you determine playing time. Everyone knows that if you miss a practice, you do not play. It is the day of a game against your biggest rivals, the Wildcats. Your three stars decided that they didn't need to practice yesterday because the Wildcats have not fielded a good team this year and you are predicted to win big. You also know that a number of scouts are here to watch the game. Given your policy, do you bench your stars or do you play them? It is right to enforce the rules and it is right to help your player's future. You have to do one and you cannot do both.

Paradigm
Exercise

Do: Break the class into groups of four six people. Have each student take about 2-3 minutes and describe the key points of a right vs. right dilemma they have faced. Each student should give enough detail that the group will understand what was happening but not so much as to lose the point. Then the members of the group should discuss if the situation is a right vs. right situation and identify which of the four paradigms the dilemma fits into?

Students should not discuss how they actually handled the situation!
(allow 45 minutes for this exercise)

Do: Have each small group present to the class the two dilemmas that they feel were the most interesting and what paradigms were involved.

Resolution
Principles

State: There are three principles that can be used for the resolution of the dilemmas we have discussed. **One note of caution:** These resolution principles are not magical formulas into which you pump information and get a correct answer. Resolution principles help you better understand your options and explain the decisions you made. We do not normally think about the principles of resolution; however, we probably know them well.

Ends-Based

State: This principle says we should do what would result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This is also called "utilitarianism." This idea focuses on the natural results of a decision rather than the rule that

governed it or the motive behind it. Modern policy making and legislation follows this concept.

The ends-based principle comes in two parts. The first part is the “greatest good.” The second part is the “greatest number.” Both of these ideas leave a lot to interpretation. The further into the future you look, the easier it is to rationalize different numbers of those effected. Also, if two or more “goods” could happen, the user has to determine which good is the greatest. The main drawback to this concept is it requires forecasting on the part of the user and people are rarely very accurate at speculation.

Rule-Based

State: The rule-based principle is derived from the reason for making a decision rather than the outcome. Its application is simple: the action to be taken is the one the user would choose under similar sets of circumstances for the rest of eternity. Or, “If I do this, I would want everyone to make the same decision under similar circumstances forever.”

This principle states that the outcome is of no importance. The important thing is that the action is one of duty and that possible ramifications to others are ignored. You have made the decision because that is what you would expect others in the same situation to do every time.

Care-Based

State: So what do you do if you don't like either of the two above options? You might think the rule-based principle is too cold and the ends-based principle is too unrealistic. If this is the case, then you might want to look into the care-based approach. Although this principle has several names, it is most often referred to as the “golden rule.” It is based on the concept of reversibility. The way to apply it is to place yourself into the situation as the receiver rather than the sender.

This concept is often thought of as a Christian proverb, and it does appear in the Bible. But it also appears in the Jewish and Islamic faiths as well as Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, and Zoroastrianism.

- ☐ The Bible states, “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law of the prophets.”
- ☐ The Talmud states, “That which you hold as detestable, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole law: the rest is but commentary.”

- ❑ The Book of Islam states, “None of you is a believer if he does not desire for his brother that which he desires for himself.”
- ❑ Confucius stated, “Here certainly is the golden maxim: Do not do to others that which we do not want them to do to us.”

Applying the Resolution Principles

State: Now that you know about the resolution principles, let’s break up into the same small groups from the last exercise and apply each resolution principle to our two right vs. right dilemmas. Remember, this is not a majority vote—try and come to consensus on each scenario. After you have applied each resolution principle to the two dilemmas, the group should reach a final decision of how it would best solve these dilemmas. Keep in mind that just because two of three principles might lead you to choose the same course of action doesn’t mean that is the “best” decision. (allow 60 minutes for this exercise)

Do: After the small group discussions, have each group present the resolution principles for their two best dilemmas. Each group should explain how they interpreted and applied each resolution principle. Then have the class pick what decision they would have made based on the situation. Finally have the student present the actual decision he/she made to resolve the situation. It is extremely important to understand: **There are always at least two right decisions from which to choose. Neither is wrong.**

The “Tri-lemma”

State: Sometimes we may think that we only have two decisions from which to choose. That may not always be true. There are times when an unseen option may exist. It is important that we train our selves to look for the third alternative or the “tri-lemma.”

Closing

State: Don’t forget the trooper’s story. Initially the trooper thought he had only two courses of action. He had not looked for a third option right away. However, it was his ethical fitness and ability to analyze the situation that helped him resolve that situation and find a moral and ethical alternative.